

Kurt Weill Newsletter

VOLUME 35

NUMBER 1

SPRING 2017



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Reviews of Festivals in Los Angeles and Dessau

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Cover photo: The first book scene, or sketch, set in Mayville in 1791, from the original production of *Love Life* on Broadway, 1948.
Photo: Vandamm

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Published twice a year, the *Kurt Weill Newsletter* features articles and reviews (books, performances, recordings) that center on Kurt Weill but take a broader look at issues of twentieth-century music and theater. With a print run of 5,000 copies, the *Newsletter* is distributed worldwide. Subscriptions are free. The editor welcomes the submission of articles, reviews, and news items for consideration.

A variety of opinions are expressed in the *Newsletter*; they do not necessarily represent the publisher's official viewpoint. Letters to the editor are welcome.

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CORRECTION

While I was pleased, as the author of the first Marc Blitzstein biography (*Mark the Music: The Life and Work of Marc Blitzstein*, St. Martin's, 1989), to read David Möscher's review of the *Airborne Symphony* in San Francisco [Fall 2016], he is mistaken in saying (twice) that this was the West Coast premiere of the work. The Seattle Men's Chorus performed *Airborne* on 30 March 1991. I happen to know because I gave the pre-concert talk about the composer and the work.

Eric A. Gordon
Los Angeles

EDITOR'S NOTE

The *Newsletter* has not considered the groundbreaking Broadway show *Love Life* in many years, but the time, as Lotte Lenya might have said, is ripe. Professor Joel Galand, who previously prepared *The Firebrand of Florence* for the Kurt Weill Edition, has moved on to *Love Life*, and that edition will soon be ready for its close-up. The first production to make use of Galand's work will be the German stage premiere, scheduled to open 9 December 2017 in Freiburg. The production will serve as a pre-publication test for the score and instrumental parts. Galand shares a small part of his wealth of knowledge of *Love Life* in this issue.

We also offer comprehensive coverage of two Weill festivals, "Lift Every Voice" in Los Angeles and the 25th Kurt Weill Fest in Dessau, along with reviews of two premieres: a recording of *The Road of Promise* and the first performance in Europe of *Love-Musik*. Finally, an interview with Austrian singer-actress Sona MacDonald, now starring in *Lenya Story: Ein Liebeslied* in Vienna, graces our news section, just before an account on the finals of the twentieth annual Lotte Lenya Competition and reports on the successes of previous winners.

Dave Stein

New Works Available for Licensing

• **Chansons des quais/Songs of the Waterfront: Cycle for soprano, male quartet, and chamber ensemble**, compiled and edited by Kim H. Kowalke from music by Kurt Weill intended for *Marie Galante*, with lyrics by Jacques Deval. New material includes a reconstruction of the "Introduction" from fragmentary sources by HK Gruber, as well as new vocal arrangements and the sequencing of songs and interludes without reference to the original stage work. It was performed for the first time at the Kurt Weill Fest Dessau, 12 March 2017 (see review on p. 15) with soprano Ute Gfrerer, ensemble amarcord, and Ensemble Modern under HK Gruber. A month later they went into the studio and recorded it with some editorial modifications. The work is approximately 30 minutes in duration and requires five singers (soprano soloist and TTBB quartet) and seventeen players. *Chansons des quais* is available for licensing from European American Music and Heugel.

• **Song-Suite for Violin and Orchestra**: Paul Bateman has arranged six favorite Weill songs into a sizzling concert piece for solo violin and ensemble. The accompaniment comes in two versions: chamber ensemble and full symphonic orchestra. Violinist Daniel Hope premiered the chamber version to great acclaim during last winter's "Lift Every Voice" festival in Los Angeles (see review on p. 12); he is scheduled to perform the symphonic version again in Essen, May 2018. To date, Hope has recorded two of Bateman's arrangements on separate discs: "Speak Low" on *Escape to Paradise* and "September Song" on this year's *For Seasons* (both on Deutsche Grammophon). The complete work, in both orchestrations, is available for rental from European American Music.

Three new instrumental suites are in development, to be unveiled in the near future:

• **Much Ado about Love** takes its name from the working title of Weill's "smash flop" Broadway operetta *The Firebrand of Florence*. The sumptuous score contains several dances—a Sarabande, a Gigue, a Tarantella, a Waltz—now brought together as a suite using Weill's own orchestrations. The work, conceived and edited by Kim H. Kowalke and John Baxindine, will see its American premiere at the Brevard Festival on 25 June 2017; performance materials may be rented from Josef Weinberger in London.

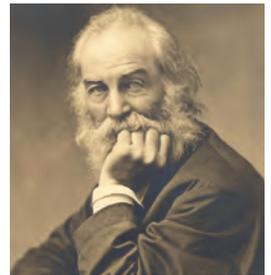
• **Kleine Zaubernachtmusik**, a 21-minute concert suite from *Zaubernacht*, conceived and edited by Baxindine, utilizes Weill's

original instrumentation: flute/piccolo, bassoon, piano, percussion, two violins, viola, cello, and double bass.

• In 2014, composer Gene Pritsker produced a symphonic orchestration of Weill's *Johnny Johnson*, which was heard first in a concert performance at the Kurt Weill Fest in 2015 (and again in 2017). Next up for Pritsker will be an orchestral suite (no vocals), tentatively scheduled for performance in fall 2017 by the MDR-Sinfonieorchester and spring 2018 by the orchestra of Berlin's Komische Oper, both times under the direction of Kristjan Järvi.

Celebrating Walt Whitman at 200

The work of Walt Whitman (1819–1892) continues to resonate with readers around the world 125 years after his death. Both Weill and Blitzstein found in his poetry a vehicle for expressing their own strong personal convictions; the two hundredth anniversary of Whitman's birth provides incentive to perform their settings.



Weill composed his first Whitman song in response to the bombing of Pearl Harbor. In part an assertion of Weill's American identity, the songs address the domestic realities of war, the cost of freedom, and the true meaning of patriotism and liberty. He composed four in all between 1941 and 1947; the songs are available with piano or orchestral accompaniment and in high and low keys.

Street Scene, Weill's collaboration with Elmer Rice and Langston Hughes, evokes Whitman in its language and themes; the opera is their collective tribute to the great poet. In the climactic Act I finale, two young lovers quote Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" and recall it during the finale of the opera.

Marc Blitzstein's twelve settings for voice and piano include several of Whitman's more erotically charged poems, shining new light on the modern understanding of Whitman's sexuality. Blitzstein, gay himself, handled Whitman's texts with boldness and sensitivity. Today, these songs find new relevance in light of a heightened awareness of LGBT rights. Blitzstein's prescience also makes itself felt in choices of other poems that deal with race relations and social justice. Composed between 1925 and 1928, the songs may be performed as a cycle or individually.

Weill's most mysterious, and possibly most influential, Broadway show will soon become much less mysterious, as two great events in the life of *Love Life* draw nearer. One is the first publication of the score and script, prepared by Joel Galand as part of the Kurt Weill Edition; the other is the forthcoming German stage premiere, spearheaded by the new Dramaturg at Theater Freiburg, Rüdiger Bering. Galand's vast knowledge of the genesis and development of *Love Life* as it made its way to Broadway informs the historical portion of this feature, and he also offers some suggestions for understanding this early example of the concept musical. James Holmes, Weill conductor extraordinaire, has provided an essay on *Love Life* and the critical edition, which he is already studying as he prepares to conduct the Freiburg production. An interview with Bering that recounts his longstanding engagement with *Love Life*, and looks ahead to Freiburg, concludes the feature.

Love Life Resurrected

Vaudeville in two parts

Music and lyrics by Kurt Weill and Alan Jay Lerner

Book by Alan Jay Lerner

Working title: "A Dish for the Gods"

TRYOUTS:

Shubert Theatre, New Haven, 9–11 September 1948

Shubert Theatre, Boston, 13 September – 2 October 1948

BROADWAY RUN:

46th Street Theatre, New York, 7 October 1948 – 14 May 1949 (252 performances)

REVIVALS:

The Power Series, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1987

American Music Theatre Festival, Philadelphia, 1990

Opera North, Leeds, U.K., 1996 (European premiere)

Hochschule der Künste, Berlin, 2000 (abridged, semi-staged)

Scene and Song List from the Kurt Weill Edition

PART ONE

Act I: The Magician

No. 1: Opening

Sketch i: The Cooper Family (Mayville, Spring 1791)

No. 2: Who Is Samuel Cooper?

No. 3: Here I'll Stay

Act II: Eight Men

No. 4: Progress

Sketch ii: The Farewell (Mayville, April 1821)

No. 5: I Remember It Well

No. 6: Green-Up Time—6a: Green-Up Polka—6b: Green-Up Time (ending)

No. 5a: I Remember It Well (Reprise)

Act III: Quartette

No. 7: Economics

No. 8: Susan's Dream

Sketch iii: The New Baby (bedroom of the Cooper house, September 1857)

Act IV: The Three Tots and a Woman (trapeze)

No. 9: Mother's Getting Nervous—No. 9a: Mother's Getting Nervous (Fox-trot)

Sketch iv: My Kind of Night (back porch and living room of Cooper house, early 1890s)

No. 10a: My Kind of Night—No. 10b: Women's Club Blues—No. 10c: My Kind of Night (Reprise)

Act V: Hobo

No. 11: Love Song

Sketch v: The Cruise (main dining room of an ocean liner, 1920s)

No. 12: I'm Your Man—Nos. 12b &c: Dance Music—No.

12d: I'm Your Man (Reprise)

[No. 13 (cut before tryouts): You Understand Me So]

No. 14: Entr'acte

PART TWO

Act I: Madrigal Singers

No. 15: Ho, Billy O!

Sketch i: Radio Night (living room of the Cooper's apartment, New York City, 1948)

Act II: The Locker Room Boys

No. 16: The Locker Room

Sketch ii: Farewell Again (bedroom of the Cooper's apartment)

No. 17: I Remember It Well (Reprise)

No. 18: Is It Him or Is It Me?

Act III: The All-American Puppet Ballet

No. 19: Punch and Judy Get a Divorce

Sketch iii: A Hotel

No. 20: This Is the Life

Act IV: The Minstrel Show

No. 21a: Here I'll Stay (Reprise)—Minstrel Parade—Madame Zuzu—Mr. Cynic

No. 21b: Mr. Right

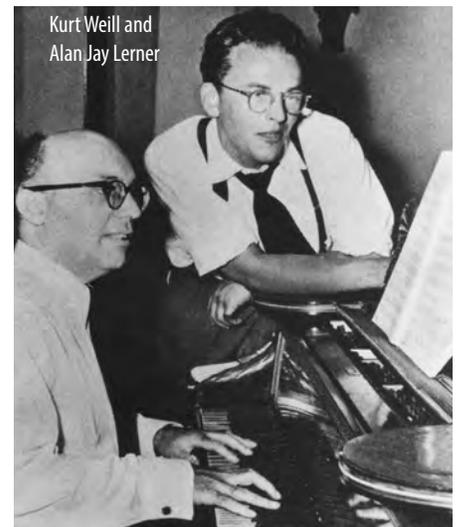
No. 21c: Finale

No. 22: Exit Music

Alan Jay Lerner recalled the conception of *Love Life* in his liner notes to the 1955 LP *Lyrics by Lerner*:

“Kurt went to see *Brigadoon*. He was a great friend of the producer, Cheryl Crawford, and was enthusiastic about the show. We had never met. Cheryl thought it would be a wonderful idea if we collaborated. So I met Kurt the night he saw the show. We had a drink together afterwards. A couple of weeks later I went up to have lunch at his house in the country. Afterwards, we had a long walk up the road. We talked of working together. He was going off to Israel to see his family (this was in April, 1947). He said he’d be back in June. Somewhere along the line, while he was gone, I’d gotten the idea of doing a cavalcade of American marriage; of taking one family, beginning with the start of the Industrial Revolution, and showing what happened to them in a satirical way.

“I called up Kurt when he returned and told him about it. He said it sounded interesting, that it needed a vehicle—a way of telling it. A week or so later, I thought of doing it as a vaudeville! I called him again and told him my idea. He was fascinated! I moved out to New City, where he lived, and we started working in August.”



Kurt Weill and Alan Jay Lerner

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE WEILL-LENER RESEARCH CENTER

The Process

April 1947: First meeting of Weill and Lerner.

April–June 1947: Lerner conceives basic idea for *Love Life*.

20 August 1947: Weill’s first dated draft of a song: “Progress.”

November? 1947: First draft of script completed (it has not survived); many songs already composed.

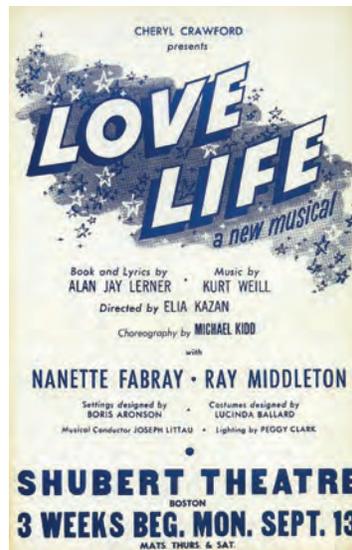
17 March 1948: Weill and Lerner deposit a script for copyright under the title “A Dish for the Gods.”

May–July 1948: Major revisions: Title finalized. Beginning and ending of show developed; scenes added and deleted. First book scene expanded into two separate sketches. Songs added: “My Name is Samuel Cooper,” “My Kind of Night,” “Women’s Club Blues,” “I’m Your Man,” “This Is the Life.” Dance numbers developed: “Green-Up Time Polka,” “Mother’s Getting Nervous (Foxtrot),” “Divorce Ballet” scenario.

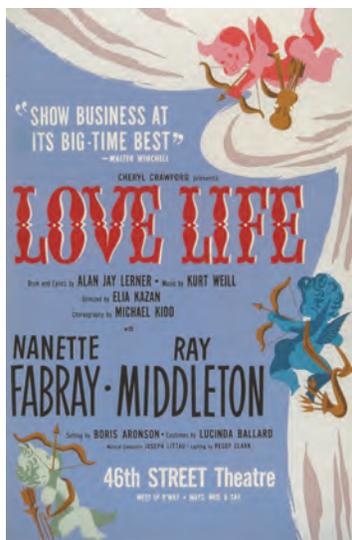
Mid-June 1948: Weill begins orchestrating.

9 August 1948: Rehearsals begin. Songs cut toward the end of the rehearsal period: “Economics (Reprise),” “You Understand Me So.”

September 1948: Out-of-town tryouts. Songs cut: “Susan’s Dream,” “Locker Room.” Songs added: “Progress (Reprise and Soft Shoe),” “Love Song” (the latter ultimately replaced the former), “I Remember It Well” (additional reprise in Part Two). Lerner later wrote, “Then



Window cards from Boston try-out (top) and Broadway (bottom)



we opened in New Haven. Between that day and the day—three and a half weeks later—when we opened in New York practically every scene in the play was rewritten and three completely new scenes were added.”

3 October 1948: Fictitious conversation—in which Weill and Lerner explain the show to a prospective ticket-buyer—published in the *New York Times*.

7 October 1948: Broadway opening. Two songs cut several months into Broadway run: “Is It Him or Is It Me?,” “I Remember It Well (Part Two reprise).”

17 October 1948, Weill writes to Madeleine Milhaud:

“I was away for four weeks with the show, 1 week in New Haven, 3 weeks in Boston. It was terribly hard work because we had to change a great deal, and every time we changed something I had to sit up at night and orchestrate.... The opening night of *Love Life* was quite an experience. In Boston we had a very bad premiere and lots of things were wrong with the show. But the next morning we had wonderful notices and the show was practically sold out for 3 weeks. In New York we had the most enthusiastic opening night I’ve ever seen and the play was in excellent condition. Next morning the 2 important papers (*Times* and *Tribune*) were negative about the play (although they liked the music). Although most of the other papers were excellent, we were not sure if we [would] outlive those bad notices. But the play has become the most discussed theater evening of the season. It has been sold out since the opening, the audiences love it, and I think it has a good chance to survive.”

The Artists

Producer Cheryl Crawford had helped bring Kurt Weill and Paul Green together to write *Johnny Johnson* in 1936, when she was a leader of the Group Theatre. In the interim, she had produced several musical hits: Weill's *One Touch of Venus*, Lerner and Loewe's *Brigadoon*, and Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*.

Director Elia Kazan signed on 4 June 1948, postponing rehearsals for *Death of a Salesman*. The reasons for engaging Kazan remain unclear; Weill and others had had misgivings about his direction of *One Touch of Venus*, and the Crawford office had already publicly named Robert Lewis, who had directed *Brigadoon*. Harold Clurman recalled that Weill always wanted the best and so insisted on Kazan, who received a \$5000 fee plus 2% of the gross and 15% of the net box-office receipts.

Conductor Joseph Littau came to *Love Life* after extended stints with *Carousel* and *Carmen Jones*. During rehearsals (or perhaps tryouts), Weill sent him a note: "Joe dear, Let's pick up the tempo of 'Mr. Right' a little—last chorus too."

Choreographer Michael Kidd was coming off his first Broadway show, *Finian's Rainbow*. He recalled, "The creative team of Lerner, Weill, and Kazan worked very closely together, and most of the decisions were made jointly. I think they got together to discuss who should do the choreography. I assume they had seen *Finian's Rainbow*, so they decided to ask me to come in and work on it."

Designer Boris Aronson's association with Crawford went back to the Group Theatre days. His modern apartment and minstrel show sets anticipated those he later designed for *Company* and *Follies*, respectively; he provides a direct link between *Love Life* and its successor concept musicals, including *Cabaret* and the Sondheim-Prince shows.

Leading lady Nanette Fabray arranged around the beginning of June 1948 to leave *High Button Shoes* (songs by Jule Styne and Sammy Cahn) in order to play Susan Cooper. She had previously appeared in *By Jupiter* and *Bloomer Girl*. She recalled, "We went up to [Lerner's] place in the country for the weekend

Nanette Fabray was walking down the street with Kurt Weill after a rehearsal of *Love Life*. They were standing on the corner when Fabray heard Weill humming to himself. "What's that tune? Is it a new song for me?" He replied, "No, I'm singing the street. See that woman and child over there? They're doing this." And then he hummed a little tune. "And do you hear that couple talking to each other? This is their tune." And he hummed another little tune. He said, "Everything in life is music."

from Ken Bloom, *Show & Tell: The New Book of Broadway Anecdotes*, (Oxford Univ. Press, 2017), p. 46

and he played the songs and I just absolutely fell in love with them. And then I met with Kurt Weill, and I was just stunned, because I studied with Max Reinhardt, and so when I met Kurt Weill I was just absolutely overwhelmed, because I knew who he was and how famous he was."

Leading man Ray Middleton was the last to sign on, departing from the cast of *Annie Get Your Gun* to do so. When he agreed to play Samuel Cooper, he said, "I want an aria." In fact, he received two new numbers. The team revised the Cruise Scene to open with "I'm Your Man" while pruning Susan's abortive love affair and eliminating "You Understand Me So." They also interpolated "This is the Life" between the Divorce Ballet and the Minstrel Show.

Crawford's papers contain a list of nearly thirty possibilities to play Susan, including Weill veterans Gertrude Lawrence (*Lady in the Dark*) and Mary Martin (*One Touch of Venus*). Lawrence turned down the role with some reluctance due to scheduling disagreements; on 21 October 1947, she wrote to Weill that she was "so damned sorry that we have reached this impasse over your new venture ... My blessings to you and Alan Lerner for a play to top *Lady in the Dark*." A few months later, Martin's husband wrote to Cheryl Crawford, "While she recognizes the picture the script deals with (and knows how brilliantly it has been treated) we both have no sympathy with this man-woman-made-problem! ... I do think you know Mary well enough to realize that personally there is little, if any, of Mary, of what she thinks and believes and feels, in the script. ... Can you possibly know how deeply deeply sad we both are not to be part of this project?"

Other names on the list included Lucille Ball, Joan Blondell, Celeste Holm, and Ginger Rogers. We don't know how seriously they were considered, but thanks to a diary entry of playwright Maxwell Anderson's (24 February 1948), we do know that Rogers, at least, got an audition: "Kurt just back from California. Ginger R. can't sing."



Nanette Fabray and Kurt Weill

PHOTO: FRIEDMAN-ENGLER

Love Life and Its Discontents

by Joel Galand

Despite an advance sale of \$350,000 and voluntary cuts in royalties late in the run, *Love Life* was forced to close after 252 performances and a 74% loss on its \$200,000 capitalization. It would have taken thirty weeks at near capacity to break even, and the show was losing money by week twelve. Its demise, which several critics deplored, inspired a flurry of columns in the New York press bemoaning the financial difficulties faced by even moderately successful shows. Why the rapid decline?

Love Life would have had a better chance had there been an original cast album, but the “Petrillo ban,” in effect for most of 1948, prevented union musicians from making recordings. A concurrent ASCAP embargo of national radio networks did further damage, limiting air play of the eight numbers Chappell had published in sheet music form. *Love Life* remains Weill’s only Broadway work for which no complete recording is available and the only one aside from *One Touch of Venus* without a published full or vocal score.

A divided press probably hurt business. Five New York dailies published opening-night reviews that were tepid at best: the *Times*, *Tribune*, *Journal-American*, *Star*, and *World-Telegram*. Five dailies (the *Sun*, *Daily News*, *Post*, *Mirror*, and *Telegraph*) furnished largely ecstatic notices. (See excerpts in sidebar on p. 8.) Among music critics, Harold Schonberg of the *Musical Courier* compared the show to opera and concluded that the score had “little validity.” Cecil Smith of *Musical America* bemoaned its “Broadway concessions.” The more astute Wolfgang Stresemann, music critic for the *New York Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, compared it favorably with Weill’s German works, finding *Love Life* a fascinating “blend of revue, satire, drama, cabaret, and operetta.”

“I’m not bored! I’m just puzzled,” exclaimed a woman seated behind John Chapman of the *Daily News* on opening night. But no doubt some degree of boredom also influenced *Love Life*’s reception. The ritualized succession of sketches and acts may have proven tedious for some. While critics universally praised “Progress” and “Economics,” reactions to the subsequent olios were mixed. Few appreciated “Mother’s Getting Nervous,” despite the physical charms and talent of the third highest-paid member of the cast, trapeze artist Elly Ardely (a.k.a. the “Russian Bird of Paradise”). *Variety* thought the Madrigal Singers a “disturbing intrusion.” Even “Love Song” drew unfavorable remarks: *Billboard* thought it should be cut; another reviewer considered it too much like “Moonshine Lullaby” from *Annie Get Your Gun*.

Recent scholars have adopted a broader cultural perspective in assessing *Love Life*’s reception. Kim Kowalke explains that it “challenged rather than affirmed traditional American values.... Divorce, disillusion, disenchantment, and the show’s acidic argument lost it public favor in the rosy glow of post-World War II America.” Indeed, adjectives like “sour” and “acid” abound in the 1948 reviews, and when *Theatre Arts* dubbed it “a Kinsey Report in a lace-paper binding,” it was not a compliment. But that quip reminds us that although its subject matter transcended expectations for musical plays, *Love Life* was also very much of its time.

To create a musical of manageable proportions, Weill and Lerner simplified things. Their pre-industrial version of marriage, lyricized in “Here I’ll Stay,” contains a healthy leavening of affection, but the love-based marriage was itself already a product of

the capitalistic forces that proceed to undermine it throughout the evening. On the one hand, as market production separated from household production and as outside wages increasingly allowed men to provide solely for their families, marriage came to depend less on economic bonds. On the other, by placing a premium on individual desire, the love-based marriage contained the seeds of its own dissolution. Such ideas about economics and marriage were in the air when Lerner and Weill set to work. In the late 1940s, writers on both left and right were making points similar to Weill and Lerner’s. Leftists tended to blame capitalism. Others (of the conservative Chicago School, for example) blamed social change, especially urbanism and the concomitant loss of traditional communities. Although in the early sketches, Weill and Lerner show the Coopers enmeshed in a community, the ideal their show seems most to uphold is that of the nuclear family held together primarily by companionate marriage.

That postwar ideal came at a cost for women who, like Susan, had joined the work force after Pearl Harbor and now felt pressured to devote themselves to an unfulfilling dual role: nurturing mother and wife-mistress. No wonder Susan feels “sawn in half”! But working women posed a threat. Farnham and Lundberg’s *The Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, published in 1947 and cited in at least one *Love Life* review, argued that women seeking employment equality were guilty of nothing less than symbolic “castration.” *Love Life*’s male protagonists share these anxieties: the “Locker Room Boys” fear their working wives, and Lerner worked in several veiled references to impotence. The metaphorical tightrope that the Coopers negotiate as the final curtain descends would have been recognized by not a few members of the audience. Many of them had surely fallen off tightropes of their own, and the shock of recognition may account for some of the resistance to *Love Life*.

Editing “The Locker Room”

Joel Galand: If you try to reconcile Weill’s piano-vocal score and Lerner’s typescript with Weill’s full score, it can’t be done. Passages have been reordered, cut, or expanded. The piano-vocal score does fit the typescripts pretty well, except the score doesn’t include any of the spoken dialogue. Moreover, the score does not give the placement of several repetitions of the initial choral stanza that appear in the typescript. The full score does indicate repetitions, but not as many as the typescripts. Which ones were used, and in what order?

Some of the most helpful sources were unknown to us when I started the critical edition: A 1948 reproduction of the full score, loaded with markings—some by Weill, some by Littau, some by Weill’s assistant Irving Schlein. Dialogue cues in that score guided me. Even more valuable was a copy of Weill’s holograph piano-vocal score used by rehearsal pianist Lys Symonette. Here, pages had been cut out and reordered, some passages written out by hand, and dialogue cues inserted. Finally, Kazan’s working script shows numbered sections of “Locker Room,” but the numbers are not consecutive. If you rearrange the passages in numerical order, you get something that matches the full score pretty well.

Opening-Night Reviews

George Freedley, *Telegraph*

"The most intelligent and adult musical yet offered on the American stage. Its sophistication might keep it from the wide popularity of simpler musicals, but for many of us, it is a sheer delight. ... Alan Jay Lerner's book and lyrics represent a sharp advance over any work he has yet done for the theater. Kurt Weill has written a knowing and a glowing score, even if it is not the best he has yet given us."

Howard Barnes, *Herald-Tribune*

"[Lerner's] originality is not matched by a disciplined imagination in this new concoction. For much of the first act there is a fresh and impudent alternation of period song and dance numbers and magic acts, satirical ballads and even a trapeze artist.... In the final scenes the whole device becomes something of a hodge-podge... More of an approach than an accomplishment."

Robert Coleman, *Daily Mirror*

"Author Alan Jay Lerner and composer Kurt Weill have fashioned a superlative entertainment—a song and dance show with great heart, soaring imagination, welcome novelty, and keen observation. ... *Love Life* is wonderful theatre. You'll love every minute of it."

Brooks Atkinson, *Times*:

"Although billed as 'a vaudeville,' it is cute, complex, and joyless—a general gripe masquerading as entertainment.... *Love Life* is an intellectual idea about showmanship gone wrong. Vaudeville has nothing to do with the bitter ideas Mr. Lerner has to express about marriage.... [M]ost of the pleasures come out of Mr. Weill's music box. He has never composed a more versatile score with agreeable music in so many moods—hot, comic, blue, satiric, and romantic."

John Chapman, *Daily News*

"In conception and in performance, [the] new musical, *Love Life*, is superb. It is novel in construction, full of neat surprises, and sung, danced and acted by an engaging company. ... Weill has not only written the music, he has also made the orchestrations—and he has been both deft and humorous. The arrangements are uncommonly vibrant and varied..."

William Hawkins, *World-Telegram*

"It would be wicked to discourage novelty in the theater, but *Love Life* tries too hard for comfort to be different. It suggests that theatrical conventions like unities of time, place, and subject were developed over the years for pretty good reasons."

Alan Jay Lerner to Lotte Lenya, 27 October 1977: "I wish I loved the book and lyrics as much as I love the music. What do you want to do with [*Love Life*]? I ask only out of curiosity and not because your answer will condition my judgment. I could never say 'no' to you, so automatically that means yes." But Lerner had always discouraged a revival, once quipping, "I've become everything I satirized in that show" (he married eight times).

Joel Galand on *Love Life* Today

KWN: How well does the original concept hold up? Will it go over with audiences, or should it be modified? If so, how?

JG: If by "concept" you mean the formal structure of the show, I think audiences would be more accepting, less confused today than in 1948. If you are talking about the show's social "thesis," as it were, the answer is more complicated. The danger with socially relevant drama is always that relevance waxes and wanes, but I think *Love Life* holds up pretty well. Two-career couples are more familiar today than in 1948, but we haven't made things much easier for working women, many of whom may still feel "sawn in half." Some aspects of the show will seem dated, to be sure.

KWN: What are your thoughts on casting the principal roles of Sam and Susan? How important is star power or charisma?

JG: The show revolves very much around Susan. Nanette Fabray was clearly the star; she won a Tony, and for many critics she was the best part of the evening. It takes a lot of charisma to do justice to "Women's Club Blues," "Is It Him or Is It Me?," and "Mr. Right." What critics praised most about Middleton was his big, operatically trained voice, his good looks, and his stalwart stage presence. You need a certain mature stolidity to play Sam, but you also need a light touch to pull off a number like "I'm Your Man."



KWN: *Love Life* has been followed by better-known concept musicals. Does that help or hurt its chances?

JG: There is huge interest in theatrical circles in having *Love Life* made available, and I doubt that would be the case if it had not acquired cult status as the "first concept musical." I don't think that the existence of later concept musicals—some but by no means all of them successful—will hurt *Love Life*.

KWN: What would be your recommendations for performing the show today?

JG: Any company that wants to stage *Love Life* is going to have to look hard at the talent at its disposal and decide which numbers—especially the vaudeville numbers—will go over best. The dances should be preserved, even if pruned, so unless it's a concert performance, a choreographer and first-rate dancers are essential.

I hope that anyone contemplating a performance would study the edition carefully, including the critical apparatus, because we do provide the tools for making informed choices. And choices will have to be made.

New Edition—New Beginning

by James Holmes



PHOTO: SEBASTIAN GÜNDEL

“Broadway’s got a brand-new baby,” reported the *Boston Daily Record* in its review of a tryout of *Love Life* in 1948; almost seventy years on, it’s disappointing (not to say frustrating) to observe that the baby hasn’t progressed past the problem-child stage. *Love Life*’s entry into the world was unusually difficult—not only during its conception, when Weill wrote and rewrote more material than for any of his other Broadway shows, but also in the crucial early days of the Broadway run, when a potentially invaluable original cast recording was thwarted by a musicians’ union job action. Subsequent attempts to revive the show have been rare—due in part at least to the marked success of younger siblings that owe it an obvious debt: *Trouble in Tahiti*, *Chicago*, *Assassins*, and most significantly, *Cabaret*. It’s telling that when *Love Life*’s choreographer Michael Kidd suggested to Lenya that *Cabaret* had found solutions to problems of form that Weill and Lerner had left unsolved, she unhesitatingly agreed.

That may explain why the problem child has remained in the wings, largely unconsidered, though it has been on my radar for a quarter-century, ever since I recorded three numbers for a BBC-TV documentary on Weill’s American career: “Progress,” “This is the Life,” and “Mr. Right” performed by the inimitable Judy Kaye. Even out of context, this small selection suggested a score not only of considerable quality but also great variety, an impression confirmed in 1996 when Opera North gave the U.K. premiere shortly before I became Head of Music there. It seemed to me that Weill had pulled off the rare trick of showing his great knowledge—and love—of American popular music styles without leaving his own unique voice behind; yet it was equally clear that *Love Life* was not without considerable dramaturgical problems. Vaudeville was a highly specialized art in which success came through years of seasoning; to re-create its spirit and pizzazz within a single stage production is hard enough without having to interweave it with a century and a half’s worth of personal and social history. Making a coherent whole from two such divergent parts presents a far greater challenge over such a vast canvas than from within the confines of the Kit Kat Klub; it seems clear that the intervening seven decades have given *Love Life*’s descendants time and space to find clearer and more concise ways of using its ideas.

Then why not let *Love Life* lie? Even though he never got around to the task himself, Lerner knew that the book needed wholesale rewriting, but he also said he wished he could love the book and lyrics as much as he loved the score—and it’s surely undeniable that Weill’s music is the main reason for trying to rehabilitate the show. Yet the score presents problems of its own. The correspondence between the Weill Foundation and Opera North pertaining to the 1996 production reveals just how tangled the thicket of extant, discarded, re-ordered, and revised material is. Any attempt at rehabilitation demands the most detailed possible case history; up till now, with the show remaining unrecorded, unpublished, and largely unperformed, that history has remained somewhat chaotic, if not incomplete. However, the impending publication of *Love Life* in the Kurt Weill Edition is surely the right moment to consider its rehabilitation afresh. Any critical edition is welcome for dispelling uncertainties and providing firm ground from which to appreciate a score, but in this instance, the accompanying material detailing the genesis of the piece will be even more significant than usual. Whatever tack future attempts

to rework the show may take, they will always require detailed knowledge of how it evolved.

Freiburg’s forthcoming *Love Life*, which I will conduct, will be the first full production to use the new critical edition, currently in the final pre-publication stages. I have been receiving scenes and numbers as they are proofread, but any difficulty caused by receiving everything piecemeal is more than offset by the pleasure in seeing the work take clear and authoritative shape. It almost feels like encountering a brand-new show. Editor Joel Galand has done a remarkable job clearing the thicket, with *Love Life*’s complex evolution clearly documented from its first incarnation as “A Dish for the Gods” through the tryouts in New Haven and Boston to opening night in New York; the account of its evolution sheds light on the music, lyrics, and book, all of which are rigorously edited. One goal of the Kurt Weill Edition is to offer interpreters the information they need without over-dictating how that information must be used; in other words, the Edition seeks not only to present authoritative texts alongside definitive documentation of their genesis, but also to allow for further evolution through production and performance. This aim of upholding the highest standards of scholarship without neglecting the requirements of the performer surely finds its strongest justification in *Love Life*, and all the signs so far suggest that aim will be comprehensively achieved. That puts us in an enviable position—much better equipped now than at any time in the last seventy years to give the problem child a chance in life.

Clearing the Thicket

Joel Galand on the critical edition of *Love Life*:

The unusual narrative structure entails editorial challenges. With *Love Life*, Weill returns to the sort of thing he was doing in *Lady in the Dark*, where you have book scenes alternating with dreams that comment on them. Weill and Gershwin overwrote, and an entire dream sequence wound up being cut. In *Love Life*, the situation is even more extreme, with well over one hundred pages of full score eliminated by the time the show closed. Weill and Lerner not only overwrote but also tried out different permutations of what they kept.

We are providing in the main volume almost every orchestrated number that was performed, even if it was cut on the road. The exception is a reprise of “Progress” with a soft-shoe dance evolution that was performed in New Haven and Boston but ultimately replaced by “Love Song” (we do include the “Progress” reprise in the appendix). The appendix is also home to two numbers cut before the New Haven premiere: A reprise of “Economics” for a ventriloquist and his dummy (cut when vaudevillian Rex Weber, who had played Mr. Peachum in the U.S. premiere of *The Threepenny Opera* in 1933, left the show) and “You Understand Me So.”

An Interview with Rüdiger Bering



PHOTO: ANNA POLKE

KWN: You first worked on *Love Life* in 2000. What is it about the work that appeals to you?

RB: I enjoyed translating and working on *Love Life* in 2000, discovering its richness in content, humor, and especially in Weill's versatile music. I didn't start to become aware of the show's influence until two years later, when Harold Prince told me he was blown away by *Love Life*.

When we did that semi-staged production at the Universität der Künste in Berlin, we intended it as the first step towards a fully staged German premiere. I never forgot this influential and extraordinary "vaudeville" by Kurt Weill—a German-born composer who had a huge impact on the American musical. When I learned that I would be part of the new artistic team at Theater Freiburg, with its excellent orchestra, one of my first thoughts was to stage *Love Life* there.

KWN: Seventeen years later, how useful is that initial encounter with *Love Life*?

RB: Very useful, first of all because it made it clear that *Love Life* is not outdated; its challenges can be met. The response from both theater professionals and ordinary spectators was enthusiastic and stimulating. One of the biggest virtues of our semi-staged version was a fast-moving, light-footed style, with quick scene and mood changes from the family scenes to the vaudeville acts and back. This lightness will be essential in creating the magic and charm our production in Freiburg should have.

KWN: You'll be taking over as Dramaturg in Freiburg next fall, and one of the first shows will be *Love Life*, which is nearly unknown. Isn't that risky?

RB: I'm sure *Love Life* will cause the biggest stir among works scheduled for our first season. It will be one of our most prestigious and most expensive productions. We are very curious to see how it will be received, but I don't think there is too much risk.

KWN: What are your thoughts on adapting a seventy-year-old Broadway show for a German audience?

RB: Our most important challenge will be finding a balance between our respect for the original work from 1948 and a contemporary approach; I think we should switch smoothly between then and now. We don't have to find a contemporary equivalent for every detail. For instance, I love the scene where Sam and Susan and the kids are arguing about what radio program to listen to: In 1948, they have only one radio and must share it; the quarrel would be quite different nowadays. I think the audience will enjoy the contrast. And because *Love Life* is about how familial relationships have changed over the decades, we can ponder what has happened since 1948.

KWN: More generally, how does one approach *Love Life* today? Does it need fundamental changes to make it understandable now? What ideas do you have about making it work on stage?

RB: We have to go beyond nostalgic reconstruction. Sure, we can tell our audience that *Love Life* was a groundbreaking work in

1948—but to convince and enchant them, we have to create an entertaining, inspiring, and amazing show. I have no doubt that Weill's score will achieve this on the musical level. Back in 2000, I sensed that audiences were open to it, even longing for it. Will it be the same in 2017? We are quite confident...

One big challenge will be to transform the vaudeville tradition, which is fundamental to *Love Life*, so today's audiences can connect with it. We should re-enact this almost forgotten genre, as there will be echoes of it in the collective memory of our spectators. But we should also refer to more familiar entertainment like movies or TV. Another question will be whether the way Sam and Susan Cooper interact might be out of date. I don't think their relationship or their problems will be incomprehensible.

There is a certain danger that a production of *Love Life* might become lumbering. We will have to make some cuts, not only to keep the show from getting too long, but to give the performance more freedom of movement.

KWN: What can you say about the creative team that will prepare *Love Life* for performance?

RB: We are very happy to have Joan Anton Rechi as director; we've worked with him on some excellent musical productions, and he has a good reputation in Freiburg. James Holmes, our music director and conductor, is very experienced in musical theater, and our meetings have been very inspiring. He has already worked with our two leads: Rebecca Jo Loeb, an American mezzo-soprano based in Germany, will play Susan Cooper. Her partner will be David Arnsperger, who did *Phantom* and *Sweeney Todd* at the Welsh National Opera under Holmes. Better yet, he is a local hero who started his career in Freiburg. [Editor's note: Loeb (First Prize, 2008) and Arnsperger (Second Prize, 2010) are both past prizewinners in the Lotte Lenya Competition.] As Dramaturg, I will be working out the concept and adaptation together with James Holmes and Joan Anton Rechi and will be in close touch with them during rehearsals.

KWN: Do you have any prospects for a co-production of *Love Life* with other theaters?

RB: Theaters in Switzerland and Germany have expressed strong interest in a co-production, but nothing is settled yet.

KWN: What other Weill possibilities do you see at Theater Freiburg?

RB: Artistic Director Peter Carp and I would like to establish a "Weill Cycle." We want to explore and stretch the possibilities of the theater and create some "in-between" productions that combine singing, acting, dancing. Kurt Weill is a great exponent of such "total theater." We are discussing productions of *Der Silbersee*, *Happy End*, *Die sieben Todsünden*, and *Lady in the Dark*.